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AUTHOR Ancis, Julie R.
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ABSTRACT

College and university courses and degree programs are increasingly being delivered via distance education, such as interactive televised instruction. An undergraduate human services counseling methods course delivered via televised instruction is presented here. It emphasizes didactic and experiential learning. The challenges of utilizing traditional instructional practices in a skills-based course that progresses from the learning of basic listening skills to more advanced helping approaches using one-way television are explored. Some of the specific issues covered here include the challenges of televised instruction and the importance of active learning. The text uses a current remote teaching course to illustrate various points on the teaching of counseling methods, communicating guidelines, alternative role play configurations, demonstration and modeling, discussion and small group activities, and question sessions. The use of media, such as having the students send in pictures of themselves to personalize the classroom experience and minimize feelings of alienation, is also presented. It is emphasized that the instructor's attitude towards technology and nontraditional formats influences students' attitudes regarding distance learning. Contains 14 references. (RJM)

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Running head: Counseling Methods via Satellite

Teaching Counseling Methods via Satellite

Julie R. Ancis

Old Dominion University

In J. R. Ancis (Chair), Interactive-Television and Multimedia Classrooms: Teaching Psychology at a Distance

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Abstract

College and university courses and degree programs are increasingly being delivered via distance education. Interactive televised instruction, in which a classroom is transmitted by an integrated system of video, computer, and audio signals to off-campus locations, is currently one of the more utilized forms of distance instruction. The teaching of an undergraduate human services counseling methods course via televised instruction which emphasizes didactic and experiential learning is presented. More specifically, the challenges of utilizing traditional instructional practices in a skills based course which progresses from the learning of basic listening skills to more advanced helping approaches via one-way television is outlined. The use of alternative educational formats within this medium is presented.

The teaching of counseling and psychology has become an increasingly complex task as enrollments continue to grow and technological innovations enter the classroom. Most recently, undergraduate education nationwide has begun to rely on new technological advances to deliver its courses and programs. As part of this trend, Old Dominion University, a four year-public university in Norfolk, Virginia, in cooperation with the Virginia Community College System, has developed a statewide, satellite television, higher educational network called TELETECHNET. Participating community colleges offer the first two years of degree programs and Old Dominion University provides the last two years through satellite. Currently, TELETECHNET is equipped with one-way video and two-way audio.

Distance learning has challenged the counseling program's faculty and has resulted in significant transformations in the instructional methods used in courses. While faculty are in the process of adjusting to the changing classroom environment and its associated technological dimensions, there is increased interest in methods of personalizing large classes and in strategies for engaging students through active learning exercises.

The Human Services Counseling undergraduate degree program was instituted on TELETECHNET in Spring 1995. The program prepares students for entry-level positions in a variety of hospital, industry, social, and community service agencies. As of May 1996, there were 130 TELETECHNET majors. Students are required to complete 42 credit hours in human services counseling coursework, and 48 lower division and upper division credit hours. Enrollments are growing. In Spring 1996, 4 classes were offered with a mean per class enrollment of 98 students. I taught a

counseling methods course this summer with approximately 100 students. Typically, 30 students are enrolled in this course.

The purpose of my presentation is to discuss methods of transforming a counseling methods class from a traditional experience to delivery via interactive satellite television.

Challenges of Televised Instruction

Specific challenges, as well as instructional opportunities, are associated with distance learning in general and televised instruction in particular. Distance education represents a nontraditional approach to learning in many respects. First, televised learning generally involves little, if any, face to face contact between the instructor and the student. Direct observation of student nonverbal behavior, which I often rely on to assess comprehension, agreement or disagreement with points presented in class, boredom, interest, fatigue and the possible need for a break, is thus often not possible.

Moreover, students at various sites are physically separated from each other. Interaction with a diverse set of peers is thus restricted. Relatedly, student distribution at multiple sites is often uneven. Thus, enrollment at some sites may consist of 1-2 students, another site may consist of 14 students and another 25. The opportunity for students at sites with limited enrollment to discuss and clarify course concepts with their peers, to form study groups, and benefit from peer support is thus restricted.

Third, students enrolled at distance sites are often older than the traditional college student. As a result, they are often balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. The social psychological stressors associated with multiple responsibilities are thus typically greater for

distance learning students compared to their traditional counterparts. Role overload and/or role conflict may result in decreased concentration, decreased energy level, limited focus, and anxiety.

Fourth, students at distant site may differ in educational background from their counterparts at the main site. Students at the main site may have been enrolled in an urban university for several years, whereas students at a distance may have been enrolled in community colleges in rural environments. Consequently, students' level of preparedness, expectations, and learning perspective would also differ.

Fifth, televised instruction tends to occur in a highly structured context. In the case of interactive televised instruction, classes typically air for a specified amount of time and each class period ends exactly on time. This prevents the instructor from engaging in classroom management issues beyond the designated class time, such as announcing the next assignment and required reading or returning papers.

Last, instructors teaching at a distance are often confronted with classroom management issues related to the technical dimensions of distance education. For example, interference may occur when more than one student speaks at the same time or during inclement weather; resulting in echoes or noises which interfere with classroom instruction.

Interestingly, the challenges of distance education and related need to negotiate a nontraditional environment often result in many benefits for both instructor and students. The limited instructor-student contact, the physical separation of students, the variation in student composition at distance sites, and the demographic composition of nontraditional classrooms encourages both flexibility and creativity. Stagnation and sole reliance on a traditional lecture format becomes contraindicated for

student learning. The instructor is compelled to consider active learning strategies which encourage interaction and critical thinking. The demographic diversity of distance education classrooms and the exchange of diverse perspectives can serve to enliven classroom discussion. Moreover, the structured nature of distance learning requires a significant level of instructor preparedness and planning; informing teaching strategies. Oftentimes, advanced preparation prompts instructors to consider and/or redesign course objectives, assignments, and methods of evaluation in ways which maximize student learning.

Importance of Active Learning

An instructor teaching at a distance must consider the context of the distance learning classroom when developing/modifying teaching approaches and instructional strategies. As an educator, I rely on both didactic and experiential strategies and have resisted relinquishing approaches which foster active learning.

Student participation is particularly critical to maintaining motivation and interest in a distance learning course given the inability for students at various sites to see each other and the related physical distance between students and student and instructor. Exclusive reliance on the traditional lecture format may exacerbate distance students' feelings of alienation. Teaching approaches in a distance learning environment must stimulate student interest and motivation, facilitate class cohesion, and decrease alienation.

Teaching of Counseling Methods

Since we have limited time today, I have chosen to focus on the teaching of *Human Services Counseling Methods* on TELETECHNET. Objectives of the Human *Services Counseling Methods* course include the

identification and demonstration of basic communication skills needed in counseling interviews; the exploration of counseling approaches and the development of one's own counseling style; development of an appreciation for the impact of socio-cultural factors on individual's functioning and the counseling process; knowledge of field methods such as brokering, mobilizing and professional practices; and knowledge of the problem solving process.

I use Allen Ivey's microskills model with a focus on the basic communication skills of attending, questions, encouraging, paraphrasing, summarizing, and reflecting feelings. Students are assigned readings and exercises from Ivey, Gluckstern, and Ivey's (1992) Basic Attending Skills text. Another required text is Tricia McClam and Marianne Woodside's (1994) Problem Solving in the Helping Professions which takes students through a step by step problem solving process and provides case descriptions of clients who differ along gender, racial, ethnic, and age lines.

Communicating Guidelines

During the first class we review the information outlined in the syllabus including the required text, course objectives, and assignments. However, the particular environmental variables of televised instruction requires that both on-site and distant students are provided with an orientation to the technical aspects of distance education courses that extends beyond a review of course objectives, requirements, and course readings. Orienting students to the televised classroom includes communicating classroom guidelines. I first express the importance of student self-identification since I am unable to view students and students at various sites are unable to see each other as a function of the one-way video format. The importance of self-identification must often be stressed

with on-site students who, because of their physical and visual access, may lack a sense of distant students' needs.

Second, the importance of interaction is stressed. Students often express discomfort and apprehension with communicating via telecommunications technology (Burge & Howard, 1990; Wolcott, 1995). Anxiety with regard to new technology can increase students' feelings of alienation and negatively affect their ability to learn (Overbaugh, 1994). Relatedly, distance teaching is often a new experience for the instructor. The instructor make take this opportunity to communicate the need for both students and instructor to work together to create a satisfying and meaningful learning environment.

Third, I apprise students of the potential for technical distractions due to inclement weather or more than one person speaking at the same time. I inform students that in the case of more than one person speaking at the same time, I will hold up two fingers and systematically address each student's comment. Back up plans for technical difficulties and class cancellation are also discussed. Students are also informed that they must attend class as only viewing videotaped class meetings is not sufficient. Since I am not privy to the happenings at each site and students have sometimes called me individually to report disruptive classmates, I stress the importance of no extraneous or irrelevant conversation during class. Last, students are encouraged to contact me via phone, e-mail, or fax with any questions or concerns.

Alternative Role Play Configurations

As the course progresses from the learning of basic listening skills to more advanced helping approaches, students are encouraged to engage in exercises such as systematic group role-plays. Since the identification and

demonstration of basic communication skills needed in counseling interviews is a primary objective of counseling methods courses, small group activities such as role plays are vital. While role play activities may typically involve 3-4 students alternating as counselor, client and observer, this configuration may need to be altered in a distance learning course. For example, sites consisting of 4-5 people may require that everyone at one site form a group or form pairs. Sites with only 1-2 students also requires the use of alternative strategies. In such cases, the 1-2 distant students may be paired with 1-2 students at the main site. Both sets of pairs then communicate via audio. Students at the other sites can be instructed to turn off their audio during the exercise so that they are not distracted and to turn their audio back on at a specified time. If visual feedback is limited by one-way video, the camera at the main site may focus on the 1-2 on-site students who interact with students at a distant site. This enables distance site students to practice, observe, and critique the nonverbal and verbal behavior of students outside of their own classroom.

Alternatively, one or two students at distant sites can also be asked to engage in a role play while the class observes and/or listens to their practice session. The remaining students can be provided with guidelines outlining those skills that they should focus on. Class discussion can then ensue.

Careful attention must be paid to the processing of small group role plays in a televised classroom. Whereas processing tends to flow relatively easily in a traditional classroom, the physical distance, possible inability to see students, and the technical aspects of distance education prevent spontaneous discussion and indications of agreement or disagreement via

head nods and other body language. Students at distant sites can easily feel left out if they are not purposefully called on to discuss their small group process. As such, the instructor may find it useful to have each site choose an individual who will synthesize and summarize areas of strength and weakness and report back to the entire class. This provides all students with the opportunity to participate and also helps to minimize repeated comments which can become tiresome in a large class.

Demonstration and Modeling

Demonstration, or instructor modeling, is also useful to stimulating student interest and class cohesion in a distance learning counseling methods course limited by one-way video. Instructor modeling with a graduate assistant or student at the main site provides an opportunity for students to observe, analyze, and discuss the importance of nonverbal behavior, as well as the degree to which nonverbal and verbal behavior are congruent. Moreover, students benefit from immediate instructor feedback. The instructor's modeling of both "appropriate" as well as "inappropriate" skills can serve as material for discussion.

Discussion and Small Group Activities

I use discussions and small group activities to facilitate student participation. Discussion has been identified as an instructional method which stimulates student thought and interest (Schomberg, 1988; Weimer, 1993) and contributes to class cohesion. Discussions are particularly appealing to distance education students as many are adult learners who tend to be highly motivated and self-directed. Discussions serve to promote these student's commitment to individual discovery (Weimer, 1993).

Guiding discussions in a televised classroom presents particular challenges. Student- to- student dialogue between classes may be awkward, particularly if technological limitations prevent more than one student from speaking at the same time (Bland et al., 1992). Distance education instructors can not use the same techniques to encourage less vocal students to contribute to class discussions as they would in a traditional classroom, such as physically positioning themselves in front of the student and making eye contact. In distance education classrooms, small location-specific discussions may help to prevent the awkward dialogue and increase the probability of active involvement by all.

Small group activities which involve the entire class working together can also be developed. For example, students may be assigned a case study to read and analyze. Each site can be assigned the task of assessing a particular dimension of the client, thus resembling various units of a treatment team. One site may be required to identify the client's presenting and underlying problem. Other sites may be asked to develop a treatment plan; identify additional information that may assist them with the problem solving process; note the client's strengths; or generate ideas for encouraging the client to share his/her concerns using basic attending skills. The entire class can then be brought together with each site reporting on the findings of their particular group. This type of activity serves to increase class interdependence and sustain interest as each site reports on different, yet interrelated, information.

Questions

While discussion and small group activities may require a more structured instructional approach, questions can be used at any point in a course to stimulate student interest, interaction, and thought. Students can

be asked to react to the material presented, to solve a problem, or to generate hypotheses regarding the influences of a phenomenon. I often present a mini-description of a potential client and ask students how they would respond using the basic attending skills.

Instructor wait-time, i.e., the time period between when a question is posed and when it is answered, represents a crucial point in student's learning and must be considered in a televised course. Attention must be paid to allowing students enough time to ponder the question, generate ideas, and respond. While instructor wait time is an important factor in stimulating student thought in any classroom setting, the delay in audio transmission in a distance classroom may require that the instructor provide more time than usual for students to process questions and respond. The ability to tolerate silence thus becomes an essential trait for distance learning instructors.

Media

Media is an effective supplement to lecture and the above active learning strategies in a distance education classroom (Parker & Monson, 1980) as media truly capitalizes on the visual format of televised instruction. Videotapes are particularly useful in skills-based courses where both verbal and nonverbal behavior can be analyzed and discussed. Alan Ivey's Basic Attending Skills videos from Microtraining Associates were extremely helpful in this regard.

Many of these strategies are not new to educators. However, teaching in a distance learning environment requires attention to contextual variables that are unique to televised instruction and consequent modification of instructor strategies. Beyond the use of specific instructional strategies, I would like to address two concepts which are

relevant to teaching any psychology and counseling course via interactive television.

The first concept concerns humanizing the classroom environment. Parker and Monson (1980) use the term "humanizing" to refer to the creation of an accepting classroom environment which decreases the distance barrier and facilitates rapport between teacher and student. Creating rapport between the learner and the distance instructor has been hypothesized to promote student interest and motivation (Holmberg, 1985). Establishing a teacher-student relationship that increases student comfort and promotes a willingness to engage in role plays, discuss communication strengths and weaknesses, and receive critical feedback is imperative to promoting skill development.

Many of the experiential exercises that are used in psycho-educational workshops and seminars, such as icebreakers, are relevant to "humanizing" distance education courses. For example, I ask students to introduce themselves to the class by describing their interest in the course, expectations, previous experience with distance learning courses, and tips for other students who do not have previous experience with distance learning.

The large number of students in some classes may necessitate alternative introductory activities. Asking students to forward pictures of themselves and displaying these pictures during class time, also helps to immediately "humanize" the experience (Moore, Thompson, Quigley, Clark, & Goff, 1990). This provides students with the sense that both the instructor and students at distance sites know them despite the physical separation; thereby helping to minimize feelings of alienation.

Personalizing the classroom experience by using student names also helps to "humanize" the classroom environment. In addition, teaching to the camera provides remote students with the impression of eye contact (Thompson, Simonson, & Hargrove, 1992). These techniques aid in increasing comfort with distance education technology (Haaland & Newby, 1984; Jonassen & Hannum, 1987).

The second concept concerns the instructor's level of comfort with technology and the nontraditional format. An instructor who views distance learning as an opportunity to educate and interact with students whom he/she would not ordinarily have the opportunity to interact with, approaches technology with an open mind, and allows himself/herself to learn from mistakes will communicate a message that is very different from the one who views distance learning as a major hassle. Similarly, if the instructor communicates discomfort or apprehension with the use of media, students anxiety and apprehension will likely increase as the classroom climate and related educational process is very much guided by the instructor. At the same time, technical difficulties are an inevitable part of the distance learning classroom. The instructor's reaction and approach to these situations influences students' attitudes toward distance education and willingness to work on the development of new skills.

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